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THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES LAUGHLIN.¹

No. 1833.]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
WASHINGTON, *January 17, 1913.*

IRWIN B. LAUGHLIN, Esquire,

American Chargé d'Affaires, London, England.

SIR: I enclose a copy of an instruction from Sir Edward Grey to His Britannic Majesty's Ambassador at Washington, dated November 14, 1912, a copy of which was handed to me by the Ambassador on the 9th ultimo, in which certain provisions in the Panama Canal Act of August 24th last are discussed in their relation to the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty of November 18, 1901; and I also enclose a copy of the note addressed to me on July 8, 1912, by Mr. A. Mitchell Innes, His Britannic Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires, stating the objections which his government entertained to the legislation relating to the Panama Canal, which was then under discussion in Congress. A copy of the President's proclamation of November 13, 1912, fixing the canal tolls, is also enclosed.

Sir Edward Grey's communication, after setting forth the several grounds upon which the British Government believe the provisions of the Act are inconsistent with the stipulations of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, states the readiness of his government "to submit the question to arbitration if the Government of the United States would prefer to take this course" rather than "to take such steps as would remove the objections to the Act which His Majesty's Government have stated." It, therefore, becomes necessary for this government to examine these objections in order to ascertain exactly in what respects this Act is regarded by the British Government as inconsistent with the provisions of that treaty, and also to explain the views of this government upon the questions thus presented, and to consider the advisability at this time of submitting any of these questions to arbitration.

It may be stated at the outset that this government does not agree with the interpretation placed by Sir Edward Grey upon the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, or upon the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, but for reasons which will appear hereinbelow it is not deemed necessary at present to amplify or reiterate the views of this government upon the meaning of those treaties.

¹Pamphlet printed by Department of State, Washington, D. C.

In Sir Edward Grey's communication, after explaining in detail the views taken by his government as to the proper interpretation of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, "so as to indicate the limitations which" His Majesty's Government "consider it imposes upon the freedom of action of the United States," he proceeds to indicate the points in which the Canal Act infringes what he holds to be Great Britain's treaty rights.

It is obvious from the whole tenor of Sir Edward Grey's communication that in writing it he could not have taken cognizance of the President's proclamation fixing the canal tolls. Indeed, a comparison of the dates of the proclamation and the note, which are dated respectively November 13th and November 14th last, shows that the proclamation could hardly have been received in London in time for consideration in the note. Throughout his discussion of the subject, Sir Edward Grey deals chiefly with the possibilities of what the President might do under the Act, which in itself does not prescribe the tolls, but merely authorizes the President to do so; and nowhere does the note indicate that Sir Edward Grey was aware of what the President actually had done in issuing this proclamation. The proclamation, therefore, has entirely changed the situation which is discussed by Sir Edward Grey, and the diplomatic discussion, which his note now makes inevitable, must rest upon the bases as they exist at present, and not upon the hypothesis formed by the British Government at the time this note was written.

Sir Edward Grey presents the question of conflict between the Act and the treaty in the following language:

It remains to consider whether the Panama Canal Act, in its present form, conflicts with the treaty rights to which His Majesty's Government maintain they are entitled.

Under section 5 of the Act the President is given, within certain defined limits, the right to fix the tolls, but no tolls are to be levied upon ships engaged in the coastwise trade of the United States, and the tolls, when based upon net registered tonnage for ships of commerce, are not to exceed 1 dollar 25 c. per net registered ton, nor be less, *other than for vessels of the United States and its citizens*, than the estimated proportionate cost of the actual maintenance and operation of the Canal. There is also an exception for the exemptions granted by article 19 of the Convention with Panama of 1903.

The effect of these provisions is that vessels engaged in the

coastwise trade will contribute nothing to the upkeep of the Canal. Similarly vessels belonging to the Government of the Republic of Panama will, in pursuance of the treaty of 1903, contribute nothing to the upkeep of the Canal. Again, in the cases where tolls are levied, the tolls in the case of ships belonging to the United States and its citizens may be fixed at a lower rate than in the case of foreign ships, and may be less than the estimated proportionate cost of the actual maintenance and operation of the Canal.

These provisions (1) clearly conflict with the rule embodied in the principle established in article 8 of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of equal treatment for British and United States ships, and (2) would enable tolls to be fixed which would not be just and equitable, and would therefore not comply with rule 1 of article 3 of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty.

From this it appears that three objections are made to the provisions of the Act; first, that no tolls are to be levied upon ships engaged in the coastwise trade of the United States; second, that a discretion appears to be given to the President to discriminate in fixing tolls in favor of ships belonging to the United States and its citizens as against foreign ships; and third, that an exemption has been given to the vessels of the Republic of Panama under Article 19 of the Convention with Panama of 1903.

Considered in the reverse order of their statement, the third objection, coming at this time, is a great and complete surprise to this government. The exemption under that article applies only to the government vessels of Panama, and was part of the agreement with Panama under which the canal was built. The convention containing the exemption was ratified in 1904, and since then to the present time no claim has been made by Great Britain that it conflicted with British rights. The United States has always asserted the principle that the status of the countries immediately concerned by reason of their political relation to the territory in which the canal was to be constructed was different from that of all other countries. The Hay-Herran Treaty with Colombia of 1903 also provided that the war vessels of that country were to be given free passage. It has always been supposed by this government that Great Britain recognized the propriety of the exemptions made in both of those treaties. It is not believed, therefore, that the British Government intended to be understood as proposing arbitration upon the question of whether

or not this provision of the Act, which in accordance with our treaty with Panama exempts from tolls the government vessels of Panama, is in conflict with the provisions of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty.

Considering the second objection based upon the discretion thought to be conferred upon the President to discriminate in favor of ships belonging to the United States and its citizens, it is sufficient, in view of the fact that the President's proclamation fixing the tolls was silent on the subject, to quote the language used by the President in the memorandum attached to the Act at the time of signature, in which he says—

It is not, therefore, necessary to discuss the policy of such discrimination until the question may arise in the exercise of the President's discretion.

On this point no question has as yet arisen which, in the words of the existing arbitration treaty between the United States and Great Britain, "it may not have been possible to settle by diplomacy," and until then any suggestion of arbitration may well be regarded as premature.

It is not believed, however, that in the objection now under consideration Great Britain intends to question the right of the United States to exempt from the payment of tolls its vessels of war and other vessels engaged in the service of this government. Great Britain does not challenge the right of the United States to protect the canal. United States vessels of war and those employed in government service are a part of our protective system. By the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty we assume the sole responsibility for its neutralization. It is inconceivable that this government should be required to pay canal tolls for the vessels used for protecting the canal, which we alone must protect. The movement of United States vessels in executing governmental policies of protection are not susceptible of explanation or differentiation. The United States could not be called upon to explain what relation the movement of a particular vessel through the canal has to its protection. The British objection, therefore, is understood as having no relation to the use of the canal by vessels in the service of the United States Government.

Regarding the first objection, the question presented by Sir Edward Grey arises solely upon the exemption in the Canal Act of vessels engaged in our coastwise trade.

On this point Sir Edward Grey says that "His Majesty's Government do not question the right of the United States to grant subsidies to United States shipping generally, or to any particular branches of that shipping," and it is admitted in his note that the exemption of certain classes of ships would be "a form of subsidy" to those vessels; but it appears from the note that His Majesty's Government would regard that form of subsidy as objectionable under the treaty if the effect of such subsidy would be "to impose upon British or other foreign shipping an unfair share of the burden of the upkeep of the Canal, or to create a discrimination in respect of the conditions or charges of traffic, or otherwise to prejudice rights secured to British shipping by this Treaty."

It is not contended by Great Britain that equality of treatment has any reference to British participation in the coastwise trade of the United States, which, in accordance with general usage, is reserved to American ships. The objection is only to such exemption of that trade from toll payments as may adversely affect British rights to equal treatment in the payment of tolls, or to just and equitable tolls. It will be helpful here to recall that we are now only engaged in considering (quoting from Sir Edward Grey's note) "whether the Panama Canal Act in its present form conflicts with the treaty rights to which His Majesty's Government maintain they are entitled," concerning which he concludes:

These provisions (1) clearly conflict with the rule embodied in the principle established in article 8 of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of equal treatment for British and United States ships, and (2) *would enable* tolls to be fixed which would not be just and equitable, and would therefore not comply with rule 1 of article 3 of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty.

On the first of these points the objection of the British Government to the exemption of vessels engaged in the coastwise trade of the United States is stated as follows:

* * * the exemption will, in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, be a violation of the equal treatment secured by the treaty, as it will put the "coastwise trade" in a preferential position as regards other shipping. Coastwise trade cannot be circumscribed so completely that benefits conferred upon it will not affect vessels engaged in the foreign trade. To take an example,

if cargo intended for an United States port beyond the Canal, either from east or west, and shipped on board a foreign ship could be sent to its destination more cheaply, through the operation of proposed exemption, by being landed at an United States port before reaching the Canal, and then sent on as coastwise trade, shippers would benefit by adopting this course in preference to sending the goods direct to their destination through the Canal on board the foreign ship.

This objection must be read in connection with the views expressed by the British Government while this Act was pending in Congress, which were stated in the note of July 8, 1912, on the subject from Mr. Innes as follows:

As to the proposal that exemption shall be given to vessels engaged in the coastwise trade, a more difficult question arises. If the trade should be so regulated as to make it certain that only bona-fide coastwise traffic which is reserved for United States vessels would be benefited by this exemption, it may be that no objection could be taken.

This statement may fairly be taken as an admission that this government may exempt its vessels engaged in the coastwise trade from the payment of tolls, provided such exemption be restricted to bona fide coastwise traffic. As to this it is sufficient to say that obviously the United States is not to be denied the power to remit tolls to its own coastwise trade because of a suspicion or possibility that the regulations yet to be framed may not restrict this exemption to bona fide coastwise traffic.

The answer to this objection, therefore, apart from any question of treaty interpretation, is that it rests on conjecture as to what may happen rather than upon proved facts, and does not present a question requiring submission to arbitration as it has not as yet passed beyond the stage where it can be profitably dealt with by diplomatic discussion. It will be remembered that only questions which it may not be possible to settle by diplomacy are required by our arbitration treaty to be referred to arbitration.

On this same point Sir Edward Grey urges another objection to the exemption of coastwise vessels as follows:

Again, although certain privileges are granted to vessels engaged in an exclusively coastwise trade, His Majesty's Government are

given to understand that there is nothing in the laws of the United States which prevents any United States ship from combining foreign commerce with coastwise trade, and consequently from entering into direct competition with foreign vessels while remaining "prima facie" entitled to the privilege of free passage through the Canal. Moreover, any restriction which may be deemed to be now applicable might at any time be removed by legislation or even perhaps by mere changes in the regulations.

This objection also raises a question which, apart from treaty interpretation, depends upon future conditions and facts not yet ascertained, and for the same reasons as are above stated its submission to arbitration at this time would be premature.

The second point of Sir Edward Grey's objection to the exemption of vessels engaged in coastwise trade remains to be considered. On this point he says that the provisions of the Act "*would enable* tolls to be fixed which would not be just and equitable, and would therefore not comply with rule 1 of article 3 of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty."

It will be observed that this statement evidently was framed without knowledge of the fact that the President's proclamation fixing the tolls had issued. It is not claimed in the note that the tolls actually fixed are not "just and equitable" or even that all vessels passing through the canal were not taken into account in fixing the amount of the tolls, but only that either or both contingencies are possible.

If the British contention is correct that the true construction of the treaty requires all traffic to be reckoned in fixing just and equitable tolls, it requires at least an allegation that the tolls as fixed are not just and equitable and that all traffic has not been reckoned in fixing them before the United States can be called upon to prove that this course was not followed, even assuming that the burden of proof would rest with the United States in any event, which is open to question. This Government welcomes the opportunity, however, of informing the British Government that the tolls fixed in the President's proclamation are based upon the computations set forth in the report of Professor Emory R. Johnson, a copy of which is forwarded herewith for delivery to Sir Edward Grey, and that the tolls which would be paid by American coastwise vessels, but for the exemption contained in the Act, were computed in determining the rate fixed by the President.

By reference to page 208 of Professor Johnson's report, it will be seen that the estimated net tonnage of shipping using the canal in 1915 is as follows:

Coast to coast American shipping.....	1,000,000 tons
American shipping carrying foreign commerce of the United States.....	720,000 tons
Foreign shipping carrying commerce of the United States and foreign countries....	8,780,000 tons

It was on this estimate that tolls fixed in the President's proclamation were based.

Sir Edward Grey says, "This rule [1 of Article 3 of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty] also provides that the tolls should be 'just and equitable.'" The purpose of these words, he adds, "was to limit the tolls to the amount representing the fair value of the services rendered, *i. e.*, to the interest on the capital expended and the cost of the operation and maintenance of the canal." If, as a matter of fact, the tolls now fixed (of which he seems unaware) do not exceed this requirement, and as heretofore pointed out there is no claim that they do, it is not apparent under Sir Edward Grey's contention how Great Britain could be receiving unjust and inequitable treatment if the United States favors its coastwise vessels by not collecting their share of the tolls necessary to meet the requirement. There is a very clear distinction between an omission to "take into account" the coastwise tolls in order to determine a just and equitable rate, which is as far as this objection goes, and the remission of such tolls, or their collection coupled with their repayment in the form of a subsidy.

The exemption of the coastwise trade from tolls, or the refunding of tolls collected from the coastwise trade, is merely a subsidy granted by the United States to that trade, and the loss resulting from not collecting, or from refunding those tolls, will fall solely upon the United States. In the same way the loss will fall on the United States if the tolls fixed by the President's proclamation on all vessels represent less than the fair value of the service rendered, which must necessarily be the case for many years; and the United States will, therefore, be in the position of subsidizing or aiding not merely its own coastwise vessels, but foreign vessels as well.

Apart from the particular objections above considered, it is not understood that Sir Edward Grey questions the right of the United

States to subsidize either its coastwise or its foreign shipping, inasmuch as he says that His Majesty's Government do not find "either in the letter or the spirit of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty any surrender by either of the contracting Powers of the right to encourage its shipping or its commerce by such subsidies as it may deem expedient."

To summarize the whole matter: The British objections are, in the first place, about the Canal Act only; but the Canal Act does not fix the tolls. They ignore the President's proclamation fixing the tolls which puts at rest practically all of the supposititious injustice and inequality which Sir Edward Grey thinks might follow the administration of the Act, and concerning which he expresses so many and grave fears. Moreover, the gravamen of the complaint is not that the Canal Act will actually injure in its operation British shipping or destroy rights claimed for such shipping under the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, but that such injury or destruction may possibly be the effect thereof; and further, and more particularly, Sir Edward Grey complains that the action of Congress in enacting the legislation under discussion foreshadows that Congress or the President may hereafter take some action which might be injurious to British shipping and destructive of its rights under the treaty. Concerning this possible future injury, it is only necessary to say that in the absence of an allegation of actual or certainly impending injury, there appears nothing upon which to base a sound complaint. Concerning the infringement of rights claimed by Great Britain, it may be remarked that it would, of course, be idle to contend that Congress has not the power, or that the President properly authorized by Congress, may not have the power to violate the terms of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, in its aspect as a rule of municipal law. Obviously, however, the fact that Congress has the power to do something contrary to the welfare of British shipping or that Congress has put or may put into the hands of the President the power to do something which may be contrary to the interests possessed by British shipping affords no just ground for complaint. It is the improper exercise of a power and not its possession which alone can give rise to an international cause of action; or to put it in terms of municipal law, it is not the possession of the power to trespass upon another's property which gives a right of action in trespass, but only the actual exercise of that power in committing the act of trespass itself.

When, and if, complaint is made by Great Britain that the effect of the Act and the proclamation together will be to subject British vessels as a matter of fact to inequality of treatment, or to unjust and inequitable tolls in conflict with the terms of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, the question will then be raised as to whether the United States is bound by that treaty both to take into account and to collect tolls from American vessels, and also whether under the obligations of that treaty British vessels are entitled to equality of treatment in all respects with the vessels of the United States. Until these objections rest upon something more substantial than mere possibility, it is not believed that they should be submitted to arbitration. The existence of an arbitration treaty does not create a right of action; it merely provides a means of settlement to be resorted to only when other resources of diplomacy have failed. It is not now deemed necessary, therefore, to enter upon a discussion of the views entertained by Congress and by the President as to the meaning of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty in relation to questions of fact which have not yet arisen, but may possibly arise in the future in connection with the administration of the Act under consideration.

It is recognized by this government that the situation developed by the present discussion may require an examination by Great Britain into the facts above set forth as to the basis upon which the tolls fixed by the President's proclamation have been computed, and also into the regulations and restrictions circumscribing the coastwise trade of the United States, as well as into other facts bearing upon the situation, with the view of determining whether or not, as a matter of fact, under present conditions there is any ground for claiming that the Act and proclamation actually subject British vessels to inequality of treatment, or to unjust and inequitable tolls.

If it should be found as a result of such an examination on the part of Great Britain that a difference of opinion exists between the two governments on any of the important questions of fact involved in this discussion, then a situation will have arisen, which, in the opinion of this government, could with advantage be dealt with by referring the controversy to a commission of inquiry for examination and report, in the manner provided for in the unratified arbitration treaty of August 3, 1911, between the United States and Great Britain.

The necessity for inquiring into questions of fact in their relation to controversies under diplomatic discussion was contemplated by

both parties in negotiating that treaty, which provides for the institution, as occasion arises, of a joint high commission of inquiry, to which, upon the request of either party, might be referred for impartial and conscientious investigation any controversy between them, the commission being authorized upon such reference "to examine into and report upon the particular questions or matters referred to it, for the purpose of facilitating the solution of disputes by elucidating the facts, and to define the issues presented by such questions, and also to include in its report such recommendations and conclusions as may be appropriate."

This proposal might be carried out, should occasion arise for adopting it, either under a special agreement, or under the unratified arbitration treaty above mentioned, if Great Britain is prepared to join in ratifying that treaty, which the United States is prepared to do.

You will take an early opportunity to read this despatch to Sir Edward Grey; and if he should so desire, you will leave a copy of it with him.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

P. C. KNOX.

THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.¹

BRITISH EMBASSY

WASHINGTON

February 27, 1913.

SIR:

His Majesty's Government are unable before the Administration leaves office to reply fully to the arguments contained in your despatch of the 17th ultimo to the United States Chargé d'Affaires at London regarding the difference of opinion that has arisen between our two Governments as to the interpretation of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, but they desire me in the meantime to offer the following observations with regard to the argument that no case has yet arisen calling for any submission to arbitration of the points in difference between His Majesty's Government and that of the United States on

¹Pamphlet printed by the Department of State, Washington, D. C.